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**EXPLANATION OF ABSENCE:**  
1—Official Business  
2—Necessarily Absent  
3—Illness  
4—Other

**VOTE NO. 94**

**APRIL 22, 1998**

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education savings accounts that the Levin amendment would strike. The amendment would also enact a ban on the Federal Government developing, planning, implementing, or administering any federally sponsored national test in reading, mathematics, or any other subject that was not specifically and explicitly provided for in authorizing legislation enacted into law. The prohibition would not apply to the fiscal year 1998 funding for the limited development of tests as permitted in last year's Labor-Health and Human Services-Education appropriations bill (see vote Nos. 234 and 298), nor would it apply to the Third International Mathematics and Science Study or other international comparative assessments developed under the authority of the National Education Statistics Act and administered to only a representative sample of pupils in the United States and in foreign nations.

**Those favoring** the amendment contended:

Argument 1:

Throughout our years of

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by the Clinton Administration were exactly such dumbed-down tests. The eighth grade math test was being designed on the assumption that the children would use calculators so they would not need to have basic computational skills, and the fourth grade reading test was being developed on the philosophy that it is much less important to understand how to spell or the difference between a noun and a verb than it is to understand one's "feelings" about a story.

Last year, for one year, we stopped the Clinton Administration from imposing national testing on America's children. We should now make the ban on unauthorized testing explicit and permanent. We urge the adoption of this amendment.

**Argument 2:**

We favor a national test as another educational tool for parents to be able to assess the progress of their children. We favor such a test because in many States the only testing that is being done is by States that use simple, inaccurate tests in order to make it appear to the parents that their children are doing better than they are. The politicians, and often the educational establishments, in those States benefit from that duplicity, but the children suffer because their parents then do not press for educational improvements, including reforms that may not be all that favorable to the teachers unions that control the public schools. At the same time, we very much share our colleagues' concern that any national tests that are developed do not become corrupt like some of the tests being given in some States. The compromise that we worked out last year, in our opinion, will prevent such corruption. Apparently some of our colleagues are still worried about that compromise. We have been monitoring its implementation, though, and it is going well. We will vote for our colleagues amendment, but we expect the work on the current compromise to continue.

**Those opposing** the amendment contended:

We are surprised that this amendment has been offered. A deal was negotiated last year on testing, the Senate voted overwhelmingly, 87-13, in favor of that deal, and we should stick by it. The Senate agreed that the NAGB, which is a nonpartisan education board, would develop the eighth grade math and fourth grade reading tests that the Education Department had begun work developing. Many conservative Members feared that the Clinton Administration was attempting to take over the curriculum of local schools. Those concerns were unwarranted, but to alleviate their concerns we agreed to give the NAGB control over the tests' development and we also agreed to make absolutely explicit that any tests that were developed would be strictly voluntary. No State would have to use the tests. The Federal Government would make them available, and the States could use them or ignore them. At the same time, we hope and expect that most if not all States will use the tests. Parents will then get a very good idea of how their children are doing academically. Right now, other tests show that our kids are performing poorly in all grades and all subject areas when compared to kids in other countries. If we had a national test, we could compare all of our kids against each other and against foreign children. We would thus be able to identify areas that needed improvement, and then engage in remedial efforts to bring all American children up to national and world standards. The compromise language we agreed to last year will bring us closer to that ideal. The Ashcroft amendment would undo that progress. Therefore, we urge the rejection of this amendment.